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## **News Release**

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### **Minnesota fugitive apprehended in South Africa; will return to face health care fraud and money laundering charges**

A 51-year-old fugitive from Eden Prairie was apprehended on April 10, 2008, by South African Police as he attempted to cross from the Republic of South Africa into Zimbabwe.

Mohamed Essa was deported to the United States and made his initial appearance on April 15 before a United States Magistrate Judge in Alexandria, Va. He will be transported to Minnesota by the U.S. Marshals Service to face charges in connection with a health care fraud and money laundering conspiracy.

Essa was originally indicted on March 13, 2007, and charged with multiple counts by a grand jury in connection with a conspiracy against Medica, which administers the Medicaid public health care benefit program in Minnesota. A grand jury returned a superseding indictment on Nov. 16, 2007, charging Essa with one count of health care fraud conspiracy, 12 counts of health care fraud, one count of money laundering conspiracy, 19 counts of concealment money laundering, and seven counts of promotion money laundering.

Essa's indictment alleges that he conducted the conspiracy starting Jan. 1, 2001, through December 2004. The object of the conspiracy was to fraudulently obtain money from Medica by submitting claims for translation services that had not been rendered to Medica members.

The indictment alleges that Essa and his wife, Indadeeq Omar, owned and operated Global Interpreter Corp., which contracted with Medica to provide translation services to members who required such services when being treated by health care providers. The superseding indictment alleges that they received member information and dates of medical visits from a Medica employee, so that they could submit false claims that corresponded with dates on which members had actual medical visits.

It further alleges that they submitted additional false claims that did not correspond with actual medical visits. When Medica began to question the couple about these claims, they refused to provide back up documentation supporting the claims, the indictment alleges.

Essa is also alleged to have engaged in financial transactions with Omar designed to promote the health care fraud scheme, and conceal and disguise the nature and source of the illegally obtained health care fraud proceeds, the indictment also stated. They prepared Global checks listing fictitious interpreters as payees, and negotiated a number of checks and deposited the cash into bank accounts they controlled in their names, the names of their children and under the business name. The funds were transferred between accounts, and eventually used to purchase various assets.

In December 2007, a federal jury issued a guilty verdict against Omar, 44, for her role in the conspiracy, which defrauded Medica out of approximately \$1.7 million. She was convicted of one count of health care fraud conspiracy, 12 counts of health care fraud, one count of money laundering conspiracy, 19 counts of concealment money laundering, and seven counts of promotion money laundering.

A third defendant involved in the conspiracy, Tou Chaiker Vang, 39, Maplewood, was sentenced April 11 to one year and one day in prison, three years of supervised release, and was ordered to assist Omar in paying more than \$1.7 million in restitution. Vang pleaded guilty to one count of money laundering conspiracy and one count of health care fraud conspiracy. Vang was employed by Medica in the State Public Programs customer service department.

If convicted, Essa faces a potential maximum penalty of five years in prison on the health care fraud conspiracy count; 10 years on each health care fraud count; 20 years on the money laundering conspiracy count; 20 years on each concealment money laundering count; and 20 years on each promotion money laundering count. All sentences are determined by a federal district court judge.

This case was the result of an investigation by the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-Office of Inspector General, with the assistance of the Medica Special Investigations Unit, and the U.S. Department of State-Diplomatic Security Service. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys John R. Marti and William J. Otteson.

An indictment is a determination by a grand jury that there is probable cause to believe that offenses have been committed by the defendant. The defendant, of course, is presumed innocent until he or she pleads guilty or is proven guilty at trial.